

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1303

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, IS, JO

SUBJECT: CABINET DISCUSSES WEST BANK MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS RESULTS

1. ISRAELI MEDIA MAY 3 REPORT THAT AT THE MAY 2 CABINET MEETING SHARP DIFFERENCES OF OPINION BETWEEN MINISTERS EMERGED IN EVALUATING THE RESULTS OF THE WEST BANK MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

2. JERUSALEM POST (LANDAU) WRITES THAT "SEVERAL MINISTERS COMPLAINED THAT THE CABINET HAD BEEN MISLED BEFORE THE ELECTIONS BY ERRONEOUS ASSESSMENTS OF THEIR LIKELY OUTCOME... (AND) THAT THE ELECTION RESULTS IN EFFECT ENABLE 'THE PLO TO GET IN THROUGH THE BACK-DOOR.' ISRAEL WOULD BE DEALING WITH AVOWED PLO SYMPATHIZERS--DESPITE ITS DECLARED DETERMINATION NOT TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE PALESTINIAN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION...NONE OF THE MINISTERS CONTENTED THAT THE ELECTIONS SHOULD HAVE, OR COULD HAVE BEEN POSTPONED WHEN IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THE PRO-NATIONALIST FORCES STOOD TO MAKE MAJOR GAINS. SUCH A MOVE WOULD HAVE BEEN DAMAGING TO ISRAEL'S IMAGE ABROAD..."

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2. YEDIOT (ZIMUKI) REPORTS THAT "GREAT TENSION EXISTED

BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE DEFENSE MINISTER WHEN THE RESULTS OF THE WEST BANK MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS RESULTS WERE DISCUSSED..." FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON JOINED THE PRIME MINISTER IN CRITICIZING PERES. "RABIN ACCUSED PERES OF INCORRECTLY EVALUATING THE (PROBABLE) RESULTS THREE WEEKS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS AND FAILING TO FORESEE THAT THEY WOULD STRENGTHEN THE NATIONALISTS AND THE PLO. WHEN THE LATTER EVALUATION PROVED TO BE THE REALISTIC ONE, IT WAS TOO LATE TO POSTPONE THE ELECTIONS. RABIN IS REPORTED TO HAVE SAID THAT THE ELECTIONS HAD CAUSED UNNECESSARY NATIONALIST DEMONSTRATIONS AND SHOWS OF RESISTANCE. ALLON EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THE ELECTION RESULTS WOULD HAVE SERIOUS REPERCUSSIONS ON THE BEHAVIOR OF THE ISRAELI ARABS..." NRP MINISTER YITZHAK RAFAEL--WHO HAD OPPOSED THE ELECTIONS IN PRINCIPLE--CLAIMED THAT HIS POSITION WAS PROVED CORRECT.

3. ACCORDING TO YEDIOT AHARONOT AND MAARIV REPORTS, PERES SAID AT THE CABINET MEETING THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO POSTPONE THE ELECTIONS, AND THAT SUCH ACTION WOULD HAVE GREATLY HARMED ISRAEL'S IMAGE. "ANY POSTPONEMENT WOULD HAVE CAUSED FURTHER UNREST, WHILE NOW THERE IS A POSSIBILITY OF ACHIEVING SOME RELAXATION OF TENSIONS...PERES EMPHASIZED THAT MANY OF THOSE NEWLY ELECTED REGARD THEMSELVES FIRST AND FOREMOST AS MAYORS WHOSE TASK IS TO DEAL WITH MUNICIPAL ISSUES..." PERES ALSO SAID THAT PARTICULAR EFFORT MUST BE MADE TO REDUCE THE TENSION, "BUT TO ACT FIRMLY WHEN NEEDED. HE FAVORS COOPERATION WITH THE NEW MAYORS REGARDLESS OF THEIR POLITICAL VIEWS.."

4. COMMENT: PERES, AS THE ARCHITECT OF THE SELF-ADMINISTRATION POLICY ON THE WEST BANK, FINDS HIMSELF NOW ON THE DEFENSIVE IN JUSTIFYING THE CORRECTNESS OF THE DECISION TO CONDUCT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS DESPITE THE APPARENT GAINS OF THE MORE RADICAL AND NATIONALIST ELEMENTS. IN RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH SENATORS MATHIAS AND JAVITS AFTER THE ELECTIONS, PERES ALSO CLAIMED THAT THE PROCESS OF CONDUCTING FREE ELECTIONS WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE RESULTS. BUT (ASSUMING THAT THE PRESS REPORTS ARE ACCURATE) THIS KIND OF RATIONALIZATION CANNOT OBVIATE THE DISCOMFITURE OF MANY MINISTERS ABOUT RESULTS WHICH CLEARLY ARE NOT ENCOURAGING FROM THE ISRAELI VIEWPOINT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND WHICH SOME OF THEM MAY NOT HAVE EXPECTED. INDEED, TAKEN TOGETHER WITH THE CURRENT DEBATE ON QADOUM, THE DISCUSSION OVER THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS REPRESENTS A SHARP CHALLENGE TO THE POLICIES WHICH PERES HAS ESPOUSED. SOME LOCAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT RABIN, IF HE HANDLES THE QADOUM DEBATE ASTUTELY, NOW CAN RECOUP HIS STANDING WITHIN THE LABOR ALIGNMENT AND IN THE PROCESS REDUCE PERES' POLITICAL CLOUT.

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